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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000724

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: JUDICIAL ASSAULT ON BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVISTS  
CONTINUES

REF: A. MINSK 643

[1](#)B. 05 MINSK 601

[1](#)C. MINSK 440

[1](#)D. MINSK 430

[1](#)E. 06 MINSK 1166

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) On August 23, a GOB court sentenced opposition youth organization Malady Front founder Pavel Severinets to his second 15-day jail sentence since his recent release from internal exile. Severinets' deputies believe the Lukashenko regime is attempting to prevent the youth leader from organizing his new Christian Democratic Party to participate in Belarus' 2008 parliamentary elections. Moreover, GOB prosecutors appear to be using Severinets' legal battles to bolster their cases against three other opposition youth activists who face two years in prison for running an unregistered organization. End summary.

GOB Continues Its Judicial Harassment of Severinets...

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[1](#)2. (U) On August 22, Judge Olga Smirnova in Brest sentenced opposition youth organization Malady Front (MF) founder Pavel Severinets to 15 days of jail time for alleged "repeated efforts to incite mass disorder." Authorities arrested Severinets on August 19 while he was presenting his new book at the opposition Belarusian Popular Front's local headquarters. Severinets' latest incarceration comes less than two weeks after his release from a Minsk jail where he and fellow opposition Belarusian Christian Democratic Party (BCDP) founder Aleksey Shein had served a 15-day sentence on similar charges for attempting to rally pro-democracy activists to commemorate Belarus' independence from the Soviet Union (ref A). The imprisonment also occurred less than three months after Severinets finished serving two years in "khimya," or internal exile (refs B and C).

As Part of Broader Campaign Against Christian Democrats...

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[1](#)3. (C) On August 21, Severinets deputy and former MF Co-Chair Sergey Lisichonak related to Poloff that Severinets believes that the GOB prefers to harass him with shorter jail terms to disrupt Severinets' efforts to legally register BCDP before Belarus' 2008 parliamentary elections without re-elevating him to political-prisoner status and thus lessening international attention and condemnation. Severinets confidant and BCDP organizational committee deputy Vladimir Ustinovich speculated that authorities likely arrested Severinets to prevent him from traveling with

opposition "For Freedom" movement leader Aleksandr Milinkevich to visit three with MF regional leaders -- Anastasiya Azerka, Yaroslav Grishchenya, and Ivan Shilo -- who face two years in prison for running an unregistered organization (ref D). Ustinovich added that authorities seized his car also to prevent him from participating in the road trip as well.

#### And Regional Malady Front Leaders

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14. (C) On August 21, Azerka's attorney, Aleksandr Galiyev, told Poloff that authorities will likely use the MF founder's ongoing legal battles to discredit three MF regional leaders at trial and deny early release to his other imprisoned MF clients, including MF Chair Dmitriy Dashkevich (ref E). Similarly, as Poloff observed August 17 appeal proceedings against GOB refusals to register MF, Acting MF Chair Dmitriy Fedaruk predicted that the authorities would use Severinets' convictions and involvement in opposition party politics to continue denying MF registration and prosecuting MF members for running an unregistered organization. Unsurprisingly, the court later upheld the GOB's denial of MF registration because of its role in "unsanctioned public gatherings" and "likely participation in elections" that could lead to "political destabilization."

#### Comment

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15. (C) The regime continues to fear MF, the most consistently active youth protest movement. The GOB's position on the emergence of yet another opposition party, the BCDP, remains unclear. Authorities do not want to give Severinets another avenue to attract supporters, but might

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not mind weakening opposition unity if a new independent party runs alongside United Democratic Forces nominees for 2008 parliamentary elections.

16. (C) The Lukashenko regime's incessant harassment of Severinets and his family following his release from khimya further disproves recent GOB claims of softening on human rights issues with the intention of improving relations with the West. We will continue showing USG support for the repressed regional MF by observing their trials, likely beginning with Azerka's and Shilo's on September 4, and calling for the release of their imprisoned compatriots.  
Moore